

Help wild songbirds survive the winter; Tips to protect our feathered friends

Delaware's frigid temperatures, high winds and recent snowfalls can be difficult for the more than 40 species of wintering songbirds that share our state's nature resources. Their food sources – nuts, seeds, and berries – are harder for these small birds to locate and reach, especially when covered with large accumulations of snow.

To help songbirds survive this winter, follow these tips:

- Provide a variety of seed types and regularly clean bird feeders.
- Locate feeders near cover and out of the wind so that the birds will have a place to go to escape the elements and predators.
- Suet can be a great resource during harsh weather events. Suet is a high energy, pure fat resource. Purchase pre-made suet cakes at your local retail store or search the internet for directions on how to make your own.
- Water can be hard to find, but you can provide warm water in a bowl or pan near your feeders. Heated birdbaths are also available. If you have concerns about birds bathing and then freezing, fill the container deep enough to prevent bathing.
- Use extra caution while driving. While there is snow on the ground, birds may feed along the borders of roads where the snow has melted and exposed seeds and other food sources.

According to Anthony Gonzon, wildlife biologist with the Division of Fish and Wildlife, the majority of wintering birds in our area are well adapted to make it through these challenging days. "Birds have the innate ability to track and locate food resources – if one area is covered by snow, they will move to another and continue searching until they find a food source that is accessible."

Although some birds may perish in extreme conditions, a bird's body is well adapted to keep it warm even when everything around it is freezing. Feathers act as natural insulators; as birds "fluff up," they trap air between layers to retain heat. Fat stores from the high-energy foods that birds consume during the warmer weather further help them to maintain their body temperatures.

For more information on Delaware's wild birds, contact Anthony Gonzon at 302-653-2880.